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PRESS RELEASE

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**Building Higher Wage Economy in New Mexico Requires
Much Greater Investment in Education, Skills Training, Job Creation
According to New Report**

Link to report: www.nmvoices.org/embargoed.htm

ALBUQUERQUE, NM - Without a much greater investment in workforce preparation, New Mexico risks being left behind the rest of the country, according to a report released today by New Mexico Voices for Children. *The Path to a High Road Economy: Investing in People, Creating Opportunity* finds:

- More than 41 percent of working families have at least one parent without a high school degree or GED, ranking New Mexico 46th.
- Of the 130,800 adults who need adult basic education, only 11 percent are enrolled in such programs, and most do not obtain a GED.
- Almost half of New Mexico's residents over the age of 16 lack the literacy skills to function adequately in the workforce.

"This is an urgent problem, not something we can wait to fix," Kay Monaco, executive director of New Mexico Voices for Children said. "The workers of today and tomorrow are not sufficiently prepared to help our business and economy grow."

The report also contains a number of policy recommendations directed toward lawmakers, employers, and community leaders that would enable the state to become more economically competitive and create a higher standard of living.

Recommendations range from providing business tax credits that would encourage workplace literacy instruction to expanding need-based financial aid that would provide aid to adults in basic education classes, part-time students and those enrolled in non-credit career classes.

"New Mexico has a long way to go to make sure that our workforce can fill the jobs of the future. My office is working with local Workforce Boards at matching workers to employers, and providing workers the training they need," Reese Fullerton, executive director of the newly-created Governor's Office of Workforce Training and Development commented. "There is a Governor's initiative underway to coordinate efforts between education, economic development and workforce training so that we will have a better prepared workforce within the next five years."

Additional report recommendations include:

- Rewarding community colleges for improving performance and completion rates of students in remedial programs and requiring colleges to counsel students to consider programs that lead to higher-wage industries.
- Allowing families making up to 200 percent of the poverty level to receive child care subsidies; the current threshold is 150 percent.
- Fully funding the Adult Basic Education Higher Education budget, with an increase in state spending of \$500,000.

"This legislative session can be a turning point," Kay Monaco said. "Some of Governor Richardson's priorities - such as increased funding for education - can begin to address the skills gap and help lift families out of poverty."

The Path to a High Road Economy: Investing in People, Creating Opportunity is supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Ford, Joyce and Mott Foundations as part of The Working Poor Families Project, which was created in 2001 to assess state efforts to assist the working poor.

For more information on The Working Poor Families Project, visit

<http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/fes/workingpoor>.

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